

Uluguru Mountains: one at Bondwa on 23 December 1972 (Stjernstedt *in litt.*), and several sight records from the Morningside area during January 1980 (Stuart *in litt.*).

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

Uzungwa Mountains, Iringa District: a male collected at Kigogo, 14 January 1930 (Bangs & Loveridge 1933); fairly common around the Mufindi Tea Estates during August, September, November and December 1979 (Stuart and Tyler *in litt.*).

Matengo Highlands, Songea District: sight records from Litebo (1600-1850 m) in all months, with three or more recorded on 27 May, 12 July and 3 September 1955 (Hay *in litt.*); also recorded from the same locality by Fuggles-Couchman and Dillingham (*in litt.*).

Mbeya District: a sight record of one around 2150 m on Rungwe Mt on 10 September 1948 (Elliott *in litt.*) and another sight record from Mbeya on 26 October 1957 (Dillingham *in litt.*).

SOUTHWESTERN MONTANE AREAS

A pair over Mbisi Forest, near Sumbawanga on 27 November 1979 (Tyler *in litt.*).

WESTERN MONTANE AREAS

Several reported over the Mahari and Kabesi ridges in the Kungwe-Mahari mountains during July and August 1958 (Ulfstrand & Lamprey 1960).

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LITTLE CRAKE *PORZANA PARVA* AT NDOLA, ZAMBIA The seasonally-inundated grassland and drier grazing land at the edges of the Itawa swamps, Ngola (12°57'S, 28°47'E) provide excellent habitat for crakes during the rainy season (November to April). Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*, Striped Crane *P. marginalis*, Lesser Spotted Crane *P. pusilla*, Corncrake *Crex crex* and African Crane *C. egregia* all

occur at this time, while African Water Rail *Rallus caerulescens* is a common permanent resident in the reedbeds. Snipe *Gallinago* spp., quails *Coturnix* spp. and pygmy crakes *Sarothrura* spp. also occur in this grassland.

I regularly search for all these species with my dog throughout the rains, and just before sunset on 1 March 1980 we were working an area of half-metre high wet grass near reedbeds. The grass is crossed by muddy wheel-ruts and these had water flowing in them after recent rain. By walking along these wheel-tracks I often obtain good views of snipe and crakes on the mud and, on this occasion, I came upon a small crane standing out in the open looking at me. Although I was in full view of the bird I was able, by moving quietly, to approach to within 15 m of it and I observed it for some minutes. It was much smaller and slimmer than Spotted or African Crakes, being similar to Lesser Spotted Crane but appearing more elongated than that species and holding the neck rather stretched up and out. The upperside was rather dull brown with ill-defined darker markings and a few ill-defined pale flecks on the back. The hindneck and crown were dull brown, as were the flight feathers, and the whole upperside appeared rather unpatterned, the most obvious feature being a broad diffuse pale brown line along the sides of the back in the region of the scapulars, and presumably formed by paler edges to these feathers. The face, neck, breast and flanks were plain slate grey, the flanks were unbarred and the under-tail coverts were not well seen but were dark and appeared barred. The bill was green with a distinct red base to at least the upper mandible, and the eye appeared dark. The legs were dark, the exact colour not being seen. I attempted to flush the crane by approaching with the dog, but the bird dashed into the grass and could not be relocated.

I regularly searched the same area during the next two weeks and the dog located and flushed the crane twice on 8 March and three times on 13 March. Flights ranged from a few metres to over 200 m and excellent views were obtained at close range. In flight the upper wing coverts were seen to be entirely unmarked, plain dull brown, as were the flight feathers, and the pale colour along the scapulars was visible. The dull brown back had a few whitish streaks in the centre, some darker markings and also a few slightly richer and paler brown markings (visible only at close range). The lack of distinct patterning was in marked contrast to the well-patterned upperside of the Lesser Spotted Crane, which has prominent white 'scratches', black streaks and rich brown markings on the mantle and upper wing coverts. The under tail coverts were well seen and were barred with blackish and white, the barring not extending far forwards on to the flanks, which were grey and had a slightly paler wash on their upper regions, visible only at close range (male Little Crane has feint white barring in this region). In flight the crane had long wings, longer than those of Lesser Spotted Crane, and the flight was powerful and low, with shallow wingbeats.

The crane was not seen again, but on 21 and 22 March my dog flushed an adult Lesser Spotted Crane from the edge of reedbeds at Itawa and I was able to confirm the plumage differences mentioned above and also to see that the Lesser Spotted was a dumper bird with shorter wings and a weaker flight.

All my observations were made using x10 binoculars. Although I have never before seen Little Crane I am very familiar with all the crakes which occur at Itawa, and I am confident that this bird was an adult male Little Crane. My field notes for 1 and 8 March have been examined by D.I.M. Wallace, who confirms identification (*in litt.*), stating that points such as the upperside colour and markings, the absence of barring along the flanks, the bill colour and the elongated body shape all exclude Lesser Spotted Crane. Full details of my observations are on file at the Zoological Museum, Tring.

The Little Crane is a Palaearctic species whose winter distribution is imperfectly known due to its secretive behaviour, but it is known to winter

in Africa, south to at least Butiaba (1°49'N) in western Uganda (Britton 1980). I can find no evidence of its occurrence in Kenya, the southernmost limit given by Moreau (1972), Glutz von Blotzheim, Bauer & Bezzel (1973) and Cramp & Simmons (1980). The Butiaba records refer to four collected females (and three other birds seen) in December 1901 (Jackson 1938). It may, therefore, be only an irregular visitor to East Africa, but most crane species are very infrequently recorded, and the lack of sightings is possibly due more to the difficulty experienced in obtaining good views of these secretive birds and to observers' unfamiliarity with them, than to an actual scarcity of cranes. Nevertheless, its occurrence as far south as Zambia is unexpected.

I have Ndola records of the Spotted Crane for all years from 1975 to 1980, most being from Kanini Sewage Works where they occur at the edges of muddy tanks close to dense cover. I had few records from Itawa until the 1979/1980 rains, when I regularly flushed these cranes from wet grassland, numbers seeming to be much higher here than in previous years. Indeed, my total number of Ndola records for this rains period is remarkably large - some 41 sightings between 11 December 1979 and 11 April 1980. In contrast, Corncrake occurrences at Itawa were no more numerous than in previous years. These observations suggest that wet-habitat Palearctic cranes may have reached Zambia in greater numbers than usual in this season, possibly due to dry conditions further north (which would presumably not affect Corncrakes to the same extent). This would provide some explanation for the unexpected occurrence of the Little Crane.

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OCCURRENCE OF A BLACK TERN *CHLIDONIAS NIGER* AT DANDORA, KENYA On 12 October 1980, during a visit to the new Dandora Sewage Works, eastern Nairobi, we observed over one of the ponds a somewhat heavy-looking marsh tern which, at close quarters, displayed grey smudges on the sides of the breast. On close examination, including views together with a single White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, it became clear that this was a non-breeding plumaged Black Tern *C. niger*.

The upperparts were grey, but less dark than in the juvenile plumage familiar in early autumn in Europe. The diagnostic breast marks, grey rather than blackish, were not readily visible at ranges above 50 m. In addition to the breast marks, the following points of distinction from *C. leucopterus* were noted: the bill was longer; the body size was marginally larger and the wingbeat slower, not speeding up to the extent observed in *leucopterus* when the bird dipped to pick from the water surface; the rump was grey, uniform with the mantle. The hood was similar in extent to that of *leucopterus*, the black through and behind the eye extending broadly across the top of the head.

The bird was also seen by B.S. Meadows (on the same day) and D.A. Turner (on 13th), both of whom agreed with the identification. It was still present on 18 October, when it was observed by DJP and J. Halliday in company with four *leucopterus*.